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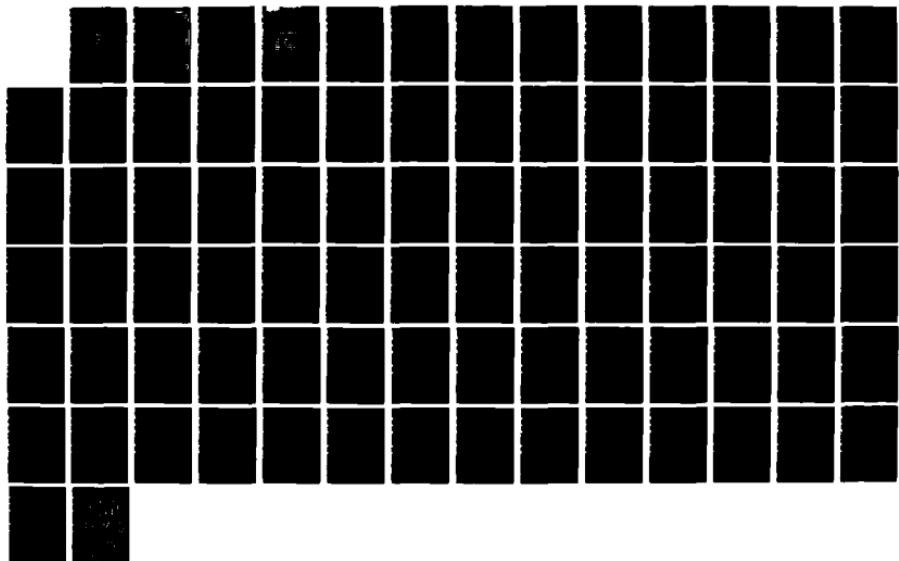
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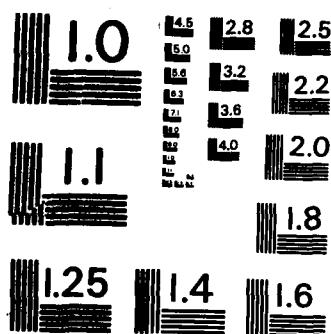
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DEFENSE OF A BRIDGEHEAD AND EXPLOITATION OF A SUCCESSFUL ATTACK.

REMAGEN BRIDGEHEAD

DELIBERATE ATTACK / RIVER CROSSING

9th Armored Division, III Corps, 12th Army Group

7 -17 MARCH 1945

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ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: The Remagen Bridgehead, 7 - 17 March 1945

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, Deliberate River Crossing

OPPOSING FORCES: US: 12th Army Group
 III Corps
 9th Armored Division
 9th Infantry Division
 1st Infantry Division
 78th Infantry Division
 7th Armored Division
 75th Infantry Division
 99th Infantry Division
 16th AA Artillery Group

German: Army Group B
 Fifteenth Army
 LXVII Corps
 3rd Parachute Division
 353rd Volksgrenadier Division
 272nd Volksgrenadier Division
 277th Volksgrenadier Division
 62nd Volksgrenadier Division
 89th Infantry Division
 26th Infantry Division
 11th Panzer Division
 13th Volksgrenadier Division
 340th Volksgrenadier Division
 20th Volksgrenadier Division
 Volksstrum (Home defense force)

SYNOPSIS: On 7 March 1945, a task force from the U.S. 9th Armored Division discovered the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen still standing. It was the only Rhine River bridge not demolished by the Germans. Taking a gamble, the leading elements of the task force attacked the bridge, raced across and established a bridgehead on the east bank. The bridgehead was rapidly reinforced and expanded drawing units from other parts of the front. Although the Germans made repeated attempts to demolish the bridge and conducted numerous counterattacks, divisions of three U.S. Corps (III, V, & VII Corps) were rushed across the river. The lessons of Remagen include defense of a bridgehead and exploitation of a successful attack.

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CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	THE STRATEGIC SETTING	
	GENERAL	3
	ALLIED FORCES	5
	GERMAN FORCES	13
III	THE TACTICAL SITUATION	
	THE AREA OF OPERATION	20
	COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF OPPOSING FORCES	21
	IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVES OF EACH ANTAGONIST .	31
	FEASIBLE COURSES OF ACTION FOR EACH ANTAGONIST	
	GERMAN ALTERNATIVES	35
	ALLIED ALTERNATIVES	38
IV	THE FIGHT	
	THE ASSAULT PHASE	40
	EXPANSION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD	47
	THE KEY EVENTS	54
	THE OUTCOME	56
V	ASSESS SIGNIFICANCE	59

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a battle analysis of US Army river crossing operations over the Rhine River at the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge, Remagen, Germany, beginning 7 March 1945. The action is commonly referred to as the Remagen Bridgehead Operation.

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This study is based on national publications and documents prepared during and after World War II as well as private historical accounts of the Remagen operation. Many primary and secondary sources were available for this analysis due to notoriety that the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge achieved. Primary sources included memoirs, unit after-action reports, reports of interrogation, interviews with combatants, and operations orders. Secondary sources covered a wide range of materials. Historical books were written by participants in the battle, by US Army service schools and by scholars. The majority of both primary and secondary sources were written from the American point of view, although useful material was gathered from British authors, from the interrogation of German POWs during the war and from interviews of German officers after the war. Since the action has been so widely studied, it is doubtful that any new sources were discovered. With the great proliferation of material available, some difficulty was encountered in resolving conflicts in data, particularly in the dates and times and in German troop strengths at the bridge. This analysis represents a reinterpretation of the events surrounding the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge and its subsequent exploitation. Its organization places a discussion of the strategic setting first, followed by a review of the tactical situation, a description the fight, and an analysis of the significance of the outcome. It is unique in that the operation is analyzed from both points of view.

American and German.

II. THE STRATEGIC SETTING

GENERAL

The crossing of the Rhine River by the 9th Armored Division is only a small piece in the gigantic jigsaw puzzle of World War II. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a glimpse at the overall picture before narrowing our scope to study the crossing in detail.

1 September 1939 marked the beginning of World War II in Europe. Units of the German Wehrmacht rolled across the Polish border and two days later Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. The attack into Poland was extremely successful, evidenced by the fact that the Poles were forced to surrender within a month.

Having conquered Poland, Hitler used the winter months to plan the campaign against the Allies and on 10 May 1940 the Germans attacked to the west. Initially rolling forward against Belgium and Holland, the Germans convinced the Allies that their intent was to replay the von Schlieffen strategy used during World War I. As a result, the Allies overreacted.

The main German attack actually was directed through the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Ardennes. Virtually unopposed, the Germans moved through the Ardennes and had reached the main French defense positions by the 23rd of May

before the French could react. The French were unable to shift their reserves and by 14 May, there was a fifty-mile hole in the French line. Two days later, the German armor was on the Aisne and rolling into open country.

The Germans reached the sea at Abbeville on 21 May and cut off the northern Allied armies. The defeat of the Allied armies appeared imminent, and by 26 May the British for all practical purposes, out of the continental war. The campaign of France lasted another three weeks and on 22 June a cease-fire was signed. By the 25th, armistice negotiations were being conducted at Rethondes in the railway carriage where the Germans had surrendered to Marshal Foch in 1918. In less than six weeks, the Germans had defeated France, Belgium, and Holland.

A comparison of the casualty figures highlights the one-sidedness of this campaign. The Germans had suffered about 27,000 killed, 18,000 missing, and just over 100,000 wounded. On the other hand, the Dutch and Belgian armies were completely destroyed while the British lost over 68,000 men and all their heavy equipment including tanks, trucks, and guns. 1 Adolf Hitler was to control the continent of Europe for the next four years.

Approximately one year later, on the 22 June 1941, the Germans invaded Russia. While initially successful, military and political errors in late July and early August doomed the

campaign. 2 The one factor that sealed the Germans' fate was the early arrival of the hardest winter in half a century. The German drive died on 5 December 1941, just twenty-five miles from Moscow.

ALLIED FORCES

On 7 December 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the Americans were at war. Germany followed suit with an almost immediate declaration of war on the United States. For the first time in history the United States was involved in a two front war. At the Arcadia Conference in Washington two weeks later, the British and Americans reaffirmed the Allied strategy: to defeat Germany first. They decided on an air bombardment of Germany through 1942 and the clearing, if possible, the North African coast. Furthermore, they tentatively agreed to invade continental Europe in 1943. The concluding decision was to draw a tight circle around Germany, stop its expansion, and then, if the Russians could hold, invade the continent.

French North Africa was invaded in the fall of 1942 and liberated by January 1943. Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Dwight Eisenhower then agreed to an invasion of Sicily as a continuation of operations in the Mediterranean. It was at this conference in Casablanca that the ultimate allied wartime philosophy was established when President Roosevelt issued his unconditional surrender message to the free world press. 3 Undoubtedly, this announcement changed the complexion of the war and lengthened it. It also provided Hitler with a

tremendous psychological and propaganda weapon with which he could exhort his allies and countrymen to fight to the bitter end.

In May 1943 the British and American planners met in Washington for the Trident Conference. Two key agreements were made: first, the Allies agreed to go from Sicily to Italy, and; second, a firm date of 1 May 1944 was set for the invasion of continental Europe. 4

In August at the Quadrant Conference in Quebec, the Allies reaffirmed the decision to cross the Channel, and the British agreed to an upgrading of offensives in the Pacific against Japan. The tide of the war in the Pacific had turned in 1942 and the pressure against the Japanese continued to mount for the next 18 months.

On 3 September 1943, British and Canadian troops of the 8th Army made an assault crossing of the Straits of Messina and landed on the European continent for the first time since 1940. Simultaneously, the Italian government signed an armistice with the Allies while the Germans started to pull out from southern Italy. Six days later the US 5th Army, under General Mark Clark, landed at Salerno. Thus began the long, bitter fight up the Italian boot. On 4 June 1944 Rome fell, but the German forces in northern Italy would hold out to the end of the war.

On 6 June 1944 the Allied forces conducted history's largest and most complicated, coordinated sea and airborne

assault, the invasion of France. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force's (SHAEF) objective was to seize and secure a lodgement area on the continent from which further offensive operations could be developed. 5

Allied Headquarters had developed a timetable for the operation based on the expected German reaction and the availability of men and supplies. In the initial phases, however, the Allies were thrown off schedule by a much stronger German resistance than had been anticipated. Fortunately for the Allies, the Germans had accepted the allied deception effort which caused them to retain significant forces in anticipation of future Allied operations in the Pas de Calais. Hitler's refusal to allow his field commanders sufficient operational latitude limited their ability to respond intelligently to the rapidly changing situation.

Seven weeks after the crossing of the Channel, the Allied forces had established a salient that at its deepest penetrations was 25 to 30 miles deep along an 80 mile front. The combined British, Canadian, and United States forces suffered over 122,000 casualties. These losses, however, were quickly replaced and on 23 July 1944, the Allied forces were virtually up to strength. 6

The German losses during this period were approximately the same, but their replacements numbered only 10,000 men, less than one-twelfth of the Allied number. 7 Despite this asymmetry, the

German forces were able to contain the Allies in the hedgerows of Normandy.

Once established on the continent, the Allies had two objectives. One objective was the capture of Berlin, the political heart of Germany, while the second objective was the capture of the Ruhr industrial area, the economic soul of Germany. This latter objective was considered the logistics lifeline of the Germans and for this reason the Allies assumed that Hitler would mass his forces in the north to protect the Ruhr. One of General Eisenhower's guiding principles was the destruction of as many German forces as possible. Therefore, this concentrating of troops in the north added to the significance of the area. For these reasons the Ruhr became the primary objective for the Allied forces in northern France.

Four avenues of approach existed from northern France into the Ruhr. General Eisenhower selected the avenue of approach north of the Ardennes via Maubeuge and Liege as the primary avenue of advance. Maneuver space and the availability of airfields were two factors which greatly influenced this choice. The circuitous route south of Ardennes along the Metz-Saarbrucken-Frankfurt axis was selected as the secondary avenue of advance with the industrial complex just south in the Saar Valley as an intermediate objective. The main avenue was assigned to the 21st Army Group under the command of Field Marshal Montgomery as overall Ground Forces Commander. The 12th Army Group was placed under the command of General Omar Bradley

and would move along the secondary axis. 9

The decision whether to attack on a broad front or with a single thrust was hotly debated. Initial plans had the 21st Army Group attacking to capture the Ruhr industrial area from the north. The First Army of Bradley's 12th Army Group was to cross the Rhine and attack the southern Ruhr area along the northern avenue. Meanwhile, General George Patton's Third Army would move along the secondary avenue of approach. After crossing the Moselle, General Patton was to advance through Alsace-Lorraine, cross the Rhine River in the vicinity of Mannheim and Mainz, and attack the Saar industrial complex. This required General Bradley's command to be divided on two different axes of advance.

On 25 July 1944, the Allies attacked to break out of Western France. The American First Army made the main attack under operation COBRA. In the north, operations GOODWOOD and SPRING were supporting attacks made by the British and Canadian armies respectively. Due in large degree to the superb close air support provided by the IX Tactical Air Command, operation COBRA was a success as the Allies burst out of their salient and began racing across France.

The operation to the south was met by occasional heavy resistance as General Alexander Patch's Seventh Army, consisting of US VI Corps and two French Corps, pushed forward. On 28 August the French Corps captured the port of Marseilles while the Americans moved up the Rhone Valley. They were opposed by

mainly second-line troops and by the end of August had reached Grenoble. The Allied forces were now firmly entrenched in northern France. The area between the Seine and Loire rivers, originally designated as the "Initial Lodgement Area" in the OVERLORD plan, had been secured. 10

From here General Eisenhower tentatively approved, on 23 August a single thrust concept. Field Marshal Montgomery would make the main effort while General Bradley supported the attack with all nine divisions of his First Army. General Patton's Third Army would advance along the southern axis, but would not have priority on supplies.

On 1 September 1944, in northern France, Allied forces were already across the Seine River in pursuit of the fleeing German armies. The Allied losses had been relatively moderate in relation to the territory won and casualties inflicted on the enemy. Most of the Allied losses were quickly replaced while the Germans still could not match their losses with replacements. Also on 1 September, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, now Supreme Allied Commander, assumed direct operational command of all Allied forces in northern France. Until this time General Montgomery had been Eisenhower's representative on the continent. His ability to manage diverse personalities and direct a cohesive fighting force was key to the Allied success. As time passed it became apparent that perhaps one spectacular thrust might break the Germans' back. Eisenhower accepted Montgomery's MARKET GARDEN Plan as a means

to this end. Under Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army, three airborne divisions, the British 1st and the United States' 82d and 101st landed near Arnhem, Nijmegen, and Eindhoven in the largest airborne operation of the war. The airborne troops were to seize a narrow corridor 65 miles deep in enemy territory to enable the British Second Army, in a companion ground attack, to pass through and reach the Ijsselmeer (Zuider Zee), thereby cutting off all German forces in the western Netherlands. Though the airborne drops were uniformly successful and achieved full surprise, the British ground column ran into stubborn resistance and blown bridges which created serious delays. Before the ground forces could break through to the British airborne division at Arnhem, the Germans threw in remnants of two Panzer divisions that had been reorganizing nearby. As the Germans pinned the British airborne troops to a narrow bridgehead north of the Lower Rhine, Field Marshal Montgomery ordered the commitment of a Polish airborne brigade. This was to no avail. During the period 25-26 September, the battered survivors, approximately 1,100 men out of an original force of about 9,000, withdrew to the south bank of the river.

At the end of August, the Allied forces were arrayed across France with the 21st Army Group in the north and the 12th Army Group in central France. The 21st Army Group consisted of the 1st Canadian Army and the 2d British Army. The Canadian Army was driving towards the Belgian city of Bruges while the 2d

British Army was moving towards Brussels and Antwerp.

Field Marshal Montgomery was concentrating on the seizure of Antwerp in order to shorten his supply lines, but so determined was German resistance and so difficult the terrain conditions that it was well into November before the job was finished. The first Allied ship dropped anchor in the port of Antwerp on 28 November 1944.

As a result of a reduction in the rate of advance coupled with an extraordinary effort of the supply services, the logistical situation gradually improved. In early November sufficient resources were available to enable the US armies to launch a big offensive aimed at reaching the Rhine. Despite the largest air attack in direct support of ground troops yet conducted, it turned out to be a slow, arduous fight through the natural and artificial obstacles along the French border. Heavy rain and severe cold added to the difficulties. By mid-December the First and Ninth Armies had reached the Roer River east of Aachen, 23 miles inside Germany. The Third Army had reached the West Wall along the Saar River northeast of Metz, but only the Seventh Army and the 1st French Army in Alsace had touched any part of the Rhine.

Soon after the opening of the Soviet January offensive to the east, Western Allies began a new drive to reach and cross the Rhine, the last barrier to the industrial heart of Germany. Exhausted by the overly ambitious effort in the Ardennes and forced to shift divisions to oppose the Russians, the Germans

had little chance of holding west of the Rhine. Although Field Marshal Von Rundstedt wanted to conserve his remaining strength for a defense of the river, Hitler would not authorize any withdrawal. By making a strong stand on the Roer River and at places where the West Wall remained intact, the Germans caused some delay but paid dearly in the process, losing 250,000 troops that could have been used to better advantage on the Rhine. 11

GERMAN FORCES

The German Army was in a precarious position. The months of June, July, and August had seen one German defeat after another on both the Eastern and Western fronts. In five years of war since the invasion of Poland, the German losses were over 3.6 million men and 114,000 officers.

At the beginning of September 1944, the German Field Army (Feldheer) strength was estimated to be at 3,421,000 officers and men. The majority of these men, 2,046,000, were concentrated on the Eastern Front against the Russians. 12 Fighting on two fronts, the German strength was quickly being attrited. The continuous pressure of the Allied forces prevented Hitler from shuttling divisions back and forth between the two fronts.

During 1944, Hitler began getting more personally involved in military decisions. For example, a commander of General von Rundstedt's prestige could not move a corps more than a few miles without Hitler's specific approval. The attempt on

Hitler's life in July 1944 further limited the influence of the field commanders and General Staff. In effect, the prewar system of command and control had been abandoned. The war was being orchestrated from Hitler's personal command center.

In September 1942, Hitler had issued a directive on unyielding defense that stripped field commanders of initiative and authority. Hitler directed that no army commander or army group commander would undertake any tactical withdrawal without his expressed permission. This order was apparently never rescinded and deprived the German field commanders of their chief operational concept--maneuver.

In early September, Hitler issued a directive stating his concept of operation. In it, he ordered that retreating German armies must stand and hold in front of the West Wall in order to gain time for the rearming of the defenses. Hitler designated a battle line running from the Dutch coast, through northern Belgium and along the forward positions of the West Wall between Aachen and the Moselle River, along the western borders of Lorraine and Alsace.

The German forces had some extremely serious problems. While the Allied problems were caused by overwhelming successes, the German problems were caused by significant failures. Losses of personnel and equipment had been extremely high. For example, at the end of August 1944, when the German 1st Army retreated across the Meuse River, it consisted of only nine battalions of infantry, two batteries of field guns, ten tanks,

three flak batteries, and ten 7.5mm guns--not a very formidable threat. 13

On 5 September 1944, Generalfieldmarschal Gerd von Rundstedt assumed command of the combined German Armies on the German western front. Considered a great strategist, General von Rundstedt was well known to the German soldiers and his return to command was expected to bolster their morale.

On paper, the armies he commanded were impressive. They consisted of 48 infantry divisions, 14 panzer divisions, and four panzer brigades. 14 Of these forces, however, only 13 infantry divisions, 3 panzer divisions, and 2 panzer brigades were close to full strength. The bulk of these units were grouped under Generalfieldmarschal Walter Model's Army Group B with a front which extended from the North Sea to a point south of Nancy in the Lorraine. In Army Group B, General Model commanded four armies: the 15th Army, the 1st Parachute Army, the Seventh Army, and the First Army. These were arrayed north to south.

In the south, the German left wing was formed by Army Group G under the command of Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz. Consisting of just seven divisions arrayed under LXVI Corps and 19th Army, Army Group G was tasked with establishing a cohesive defensive line west of the Vosges Mountains in the area between the Nancy sector and the Swiss border.

General Patton's axis of advance would strike directly into the German's First Army front, brush against the northern flank

of the 19th Army, and threaten the weak connection between the two Army Groups. General Blaskowitz was the chief ground commander opposing General Patton's Third Army during September 1944.

The lull during early September allowed the German First Army to rebuild its strength substantially. It remained markedly weak, however, in antitank defense. The main defense against a mechanized attack was the natural antitank barrier formed by the Moselle and other rivers. Artillery and communications support were also extremely limited. Army Group B held a tenuous line along the Moselle.

By 1 September the German First Army had a combat equivalent of 3.5 divisions in the Thionville-Nancy sector, with reinforcements close behind. On 5 September the German 1st Army held a loosely formed front stretching from Sedan in the northwest to an ill-defined boundary south of Nancy. The 1st Army was given the mission of defending the major industrial area around Longwy and Briey, as well as the Saar Valley.

An organized defense now existed in the German First Army sector. Although it was dangerously thin and retained only one panzer brigade in reserve, the West Wall was growing stronger daily as reinforcements arrived.

On 16 December, Hitler struck back with his long-planned counteroffensive. Hitler intended to strike with 11 panzer divisions through the Ardennes, cross the Meuse River, and

recapture Antwerp, thereby trapping four Allied armies in the north. Allied intelligence early noted the assembling of strong armored forces near Cologne and most intelligence officers predicted that these were intended to counterattack once the First and Ninth armies had crossed the Roer River. Before dawn on 16 December, three German armies totaling 25 divisions struck along 70 miles of the Ardennes front, an area thinly manned by six American divisions. 15

The most notable German success occurred south of St. Vith, where by nightfall of the second day two panzer corps of the Fifth Panzer Army had broken into Luxembourg and were headed toward the Meuse River by way of the Belgian road crossing at Bastogne. In countering this offensive, General Eisenhower alerted the only American divisions immediately available as theater reserves, the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, under the XVIII Airborne Corps. He ordered the divisions to Bastogne, there to be used as the First Army commander directed.

General Eisenhower also directed that General Patton curtail his offensive against the West Wall in the Saar region and turn to strike the south shoulder of the German penetration. As the armored penetration deepened, General Eisenhower put all forces north of the bulge under Field Marshal Montgomery, while General Bradley retained command of the forces to the south. Field Marshal Montgomery hurried troops of his own XXX Corps to reserve positions west of the Meuse to forestall a German crossing of the river. On 23 December 1944, the winter skies

cleared, and, for the first time, waves of Allied fighter bombers roared to the attack. This was a significant turning point in the battle.

On the day after Christmas, the 4th Armored Division of the Third Army broke through to Bastogne from the south. Hard fighting remained before the narrow corridor into the town could be expanded and the Germans continued through 3 January to try to take Bastogne, but without success. Having relieved Bastogne, General Patton's III Corps continued to attack northeastward from the town toward Houffalize in the center of the bulge. General Collins' VII Corps of the First Army began a similar attack toward Houffalize from the north. The objective was to link the First and Third Armies and to trap any German units still remaining in the western tip of the bulge. On 16 January, patrols of the two armies met at Houffalize. Hitler in the meantime had reluctantly concluded that his bold counteroffensive had failed. On 8 January he ordered the German forces to fall back to a line close to the German frontier and that the rest of his forces to evacuate the tip of the bulge. As a result, the Allied pincers which closed on January 16 failed to trap sizeable numbers of German troops. Nonetheless, on 29 January the allied armies went on the offensive.

Not since Napoleonic times had the broad German Rhine been crossed by an invading army. All through history, the Germans relied on it as one of the continent's safest barriers. Hitler, too, had covered the approaches to it by building the Siegfried

line to the west, but his first defense lay at the banks of the mighty Rhine River. By 21 February, however, the allied forces had burst through these defenses and had reached the vicinity of the Rhine River Valley. The German forces, facing the 12 US Army Group, were concentrated at widely separated points covering the most likely crossing sites, i.e., Bonn to the north and Koblenz to the south. The 60-mile gap between Bonn and Koblenz was left almost uncovered because Field Marshal Model, the German Army Group Commander, considered it an unlikely objective of the Allies. General von Zangen, the German Army commander defending the Remagen sector disagreed and requested additional support. His request was denied which left the defenses of the bridge initially weak. Although Field Marshal Model had forbade the reinforcement of the Bonn-Koblenz sector, General von Zangen disobeyed these orders and instructed his forces to retreat to the Rhine's west bank.¹⁶ The intent of this move was to delay the Allied forces long enough to strengthen bridge defenses. While General von Zangen's intentions were admirable, his military capabilities were not and, as a result, the area to the west of Remagen remained relatively undefended.

III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

THE AREA OF OPERATION

Climate and weather contributed only marginally to the battle of the Ludendorff bridge. Potentially, weather and climate could have been major contributing factors as the months of February through April in this region are usually quite cold. Fog limits visibility. Off-road trafficability is poor. On 7 March 1945, the weather was moderate, but the sky was gray and overcast.

The terrain surrounding Remagen was characterized by the vast drainage system of the Rhine River and its tributaries. The Rhine traversed the area from north to south and formed the last great water barrier to the Allied eastward thrust into Germany. The Ahr River, a major tributary of the Rhine flowed from west to east and emptied its waters into the Rhine just south of Remagen. In addition to the Rhine River, the Westerwald rising up just to the east of the Ludendorff bridge was the dominant terrain feature in the area.

Observation and fields of fire varied from poor to excellent depending on the forestation and topography. In general, these features favored the defender who could pick and prepare battle positions to block avenues of approach which tended to canalize an attacker along existing roadways.

Cover and concealment was provided by the broken terrain, valleys, drainage ditches, terrain folds, and man-made prepared positions. Additionally, heavy forests and brush offered

excellent natural concealment, if not cover, to both attacker and defender. In general, the defender was favored by both his preparations and familiarity with the terrain.

The most significant obstacles in the area were the Rhine River, its major tributaries, and the forested mountains of the Westerwald just east of the Rhine River.

The key terrain features in the area were the manmade railroad bridge crossing the Rhine between Remagen and Erpel and the high ground on the east bank of the Rhine dominating the river from a vantage of 650 feet and known as the Erpel Ley.

In general, the major avenues of approach were east-west road systems following the drainage pattern of the Ahr River into the Rhine just south of Remagen. The avenues could be characterized as relatively high speed, although somewhat meandering as they followed the broken relief characteristic of the area. Again, the terrain favored the defender who could choose and prepare defensive sites to effectively block a somewhat canalized enemy. The defender also benefited by his knowledge and familiarity with the area of operations.

COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF OPPOSING FORCES

The III Corps thrust toward the Rhine and Ahr Rivers was opposed by elements of the Fifth Panzer Army and Fifteenth Army, of Army Group B. Specifically, III Corps confronted the 3d

Parachute Division in the center, the 353d Volksgrenadier Division in the north and the 272d Volksgrenadier Division in the south. Other German combat units which the Corps came into contact with as it swung southeast were elements of the 52d Volksgrenadier Division, the 277th Volksgrenadier Division, the 89th Infantry Division, and the 39th and 78th Grenadier Regiments of the 26th Infantry Division. The 3d Parachute Division had been recently reorganized and its strength and morale were sufficient to offer stubborn resistance to III Corps. The 272d Volksgrenadier Division was caught in the process of reorganization, and the 353d Volksgrenadier Division had the the 941st and 943d Grenadier Regiments in fairly good shape, but the 942d Grenadier Regiment had not yet been reformed. 17 The Army Group, having relinquished control of four SS Panzer divisions and about half of the Volks Artillery Corps and Werfer (rocket projectile) brigades to the Eastern Front beginning 16 January 1945, was severely hampered in terms of firepower, armor and antiaarmor capability. 18

III Corp attacked with 1st Infantry Division in the north, the 9th Infantry and 9th Armored Divisions in the center and the 78th Infantry Division in the south. These divisions were more mobile than their German opponents and possessed more artillery support and armor.

As III Corps' thrust penetrated the German lines and threatened to encircle elements of the Fifteenth Army, German forces were primarily concerned with slowing the American

advance and effecting a withdrawal across the Rhine River, and were less concerned with defending the bridges on that river. When a task force from the 9th Armored Division, charged with the mission of taking the town of Remagen, broke out of the woods onto the bluffs overlooking Remagen, the bridge, still intact, was defended by a bridge security company of 36 men, a landwehr (reserve engineers, age 35-40) engineer company consisting of about 120 men and Heimatflak (Zone of Interior Antiaircraft Forces) units with 20-millimeter four-in-one guns. These troops were armed with rifles, panzerfausts, and light machine guns. 19

By comparison, the American task force attacking Remagen consisted of the 14th Tank Battalion less D Company, the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, one platoon of C troop, 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Battalion. 20 The Americans were armed with M-1 rifles and machineguns. Additionally, they had .50 caliber machineguns on half-tracks and tanks in support. Although they had artillery support, this was not initially employed for fear of endangering friendly troops. Tank and mortar fire were subsequently used to blanket the east bank with white phosphorous to facilitate bridge clearing operations. 21

Assessing the effectiveness of the opposing forces in the initial bridgehead, the American task force clearly had the advantage in terms of combat power, and that advantage was further amplified by the presence of tanks which served not only to give the task force the needed speed and mobility to take the

bridge intact, but also as a psychological factor demoralizing the defenders.

The forces committed on both sides would be the only ones to have any influence on the outcome of the battle. All remaining III Corps units, to include the remainder of Combat Command B (of which this northern task force was a part), were still committed to their original missions of seizing major towns or crossings over the Ahr River to the south. The combat divisions of the Fifteenth Army were concerned with disengaging their combat forces and withdrawing to the eastern side of the Rhine, and would be unable to react to units at Remagen for several days.

Technologically, the Americans again had the advantage. Although the Germans had a battery armed with new rocket launchers in the area of the bridge, these could not be used in ground combat, and were so secret that the troops using them were ordered to withdraw to the eastern side of the Rhine and destroy them in the face of an enemy attack. The Americans on the other hand were well equipped having received new Pershing tanks (one platoon per armor company) with 90mm main guns and they used the shock effect of the tanks coupled with the mobility afforded the infantry by the half-tracks to exploit their success. 22

The logistical lines of communication for Combat Command B and the division as a whole were good and fulfilled all

logistical requirements for their missions. The Germans defenders on the bridge, however, were experiencing severe supply problems generated primarily by their low priority in Fifteenth Army's overall scheme of maneuver, and by the major problem facing the entire German Army: that of sustaining itself in the face of the devastating destruction of its rail system and interdiction of its lines of communications inflicted by the American and British Air Forces. The major logistical concern of the defenders was procurement of explosives. Of the 600 kilograms requisitioned, only 300 kilograms were received (the morning the bridge was captured). Furthermore, the 300 kilograms received was not the standard military explosive, but a weaker industrial explosive, which may have contributed to the outcome of the battle. Although a German shortage of Class III had no direct bearing on the outcome of the battle for the bridge, it nonetheless caused a delay in the 11th Panzer Divisions planned counterattack to eliminate the bridgehead once it was established. 23

The personnel situation again favored the Americans. The 9th Armored Division was still fairly fresh having just deployed to Europe in time for the Battle of the Bulge. The German security company on the bridge was composed of invalids unable to serve in front line units. Not only were these individuals not 100 percent combat capable, but their transient status hampered training and diminished their effectiveness. The Landwehr (engineers), in spite of their age, were quite capable.

however, they were not seasoned combat troops. 24 The failure of the German bridge commander to obtain the two battalions of reinforcements he requested to defend the bridge was undoubtedly very instrumental in the American success in capturing the bridge.

Command and control of the American combat elements was excellent and the units were well task organized to take advantage of their combat power. In addition to messengers, their radio communications served them well. Communications for the Germans defending the bridge were virtually nonexistent. Telephone communications were sporadic due to frequent cutting of lines by allied artillery and bombing, and messengers fared no better, often being captured or being required to make detours to avoid capture (very time consuming considering the lack of transportation assets). Command and control of the bridge defenses was the responsibility of the Wehrkreis (administrative areas into which Germany was divided for combat purposes), the administration of which was controlled by Himmler and the SS. This control was to be yielded to the field armies when the battle lines came close to a particular area. 25 Though jealousy and rivalry between combat forces and the SS hampered the efficient functioning of this command relationship, the major hindrance was the confusion caused by the rapid American advances. Field Marshal Model, attempting to strengthen his forces without moving units switched commanders, and subsequently the staffs of the Fifth and Fifteenth Armies. General Monteuffel assumed command of Fifteenth Army and General

Von Zangen assumed command of the Fifth Panzer Army.

These Armies eventually assumed the names which their commanders brought with them so that although no units were moved on the ground, on paper the Fifth Panzer Army became the Fifteenth Army and vice versa.²⁶ This created problems for the bridge defenders because when Captain Bratge, initially commanding the bridge security forces, opened sealed orders which attached him to the 5th Army, that army was no longer there and the staff of the 15th Army was not aware of, nor showed interest in, the reorganization. Further confusion in the chain of command for the bridge defenders resulted when LXVII Corps headquarters was given responsibility for the Remagen Bridge on 6 March 1945 with no prior warning or planning. Major Scheller from LXVII Corps headquarters was detailed to take command of the bridge defenses, but his vehicle carrying his radios, the only communications with corps, never arrived at Remagen, because the American penetration had cut routes into the town. The strange command relationship existing for the defenders at the bridge precluded a rapid decision making process in that permission had to be verbally obtained from Major Scheller before action could be taken.²⁷

Intelligence played only a small role in the battle. The fact that the bridge was still intact when the American task force reached the town was a surprise to the Americans, as the appearance of American tanks was to the Germans. However, information obtained from a German POW and civilians in town

indicated German intentions to blow the bridge at 1600 hours. Although subsequent historical review shows that no such order existed and had it existed, it seems doubtful that the towns people would have knowledge of it, the supposed validity of the information served to motivate the Americans into immediate action to take the bridge.

The doctrine of the opposing forces was also relevant to the outcome. American doctrine to this point had consisted of continuous limited offenses. The risk involved in deep exploitation was avoided. The German high command felt the Allies would follow their normal practice of mopping up and consolidating on the West side of the Rhine River before continuing the offensive, and did not think they would risk a rapid crossing when the risk of losing the bridge and having units isolated on the east bank had to be considered by the American forces. 28

The individual fighting techniques and tactics used were in accordance with existing doctrine; however the proficiency of the Americans proved better than that of the Germans. The training of the bridge defenders was difficult because the bridge defense company was composed mostly of wounded soldiers convalescing and the turnover rate was such as to preclude achievement of any acceptable level of proficiency. Other defenders included stragglers and Heimatflak troops, some of which had never seen an American tank. This, by German accounts, may explain why some of the defensive positions were

slow to fire on advancing Allied tanks.

The degradation of combat effectiveness of the German defenders may have also contributed to their declining morale. Although morale was poor, it would be a mistake to generally classify these soldiers as defeatists who would willingly lay down their arms in the face of opposition. The ranks were still sprinkled with men who still idolized National Socialism and who were willing to die for the cause. Fanatics like these, who still felt that Hitler would bring glory to Germany, sparked resistance to the American forces. Additionally, most Germans, regardless of their low morale, responded to discipline and put up a firm defense. Many defenders, to include some of the 20mm anti-aircraft positions, failed to fire their weapons for fear of exposing their positions and drawing return fire from the tanks. The German defenders were further demoralized when German citizens in the town hung out white sheets, some even greeting the Americans as liberators and pointing out German positions. This led many German soldiers on the west bank to surrender. The Volkssturm which was organized to provide defense to the homeland proved inconsequential at Remagen. Many members of the Volksstrum had learned that resistance often brought damage or destruction to their homes and towns and thus even the roadblock they established in town was discovered by the Americans to be still opened and unmanned. ²⁹ Still another factor having a significant impact on the morale of the German soldiers was the

American airstrikes. German infantry units could readily accept losses of 100 men to ground combat, but that same 100 man loss to air had a devastating psychological impact on morale. 30 This affected the combat units more so than the bridge defenders, but played a minor role in that stragglers collected to defend the bridge often withdrew to the east at the first opportunity or put on civilian clothes and disappeared. 31

American morale, although somewhat affected by fatigue and a constant diet of K-rations, was better than that of the Germans. The prospects of capturing a bridge across the Rhine and being the first unit over also had a positive effect.

Leadership was probably the least important variable in this battle. The German defenders led by Major Scheller, Captain Bratge, and Captain Friesenhahn, the commander of engineers, were all combat veterans and exceptionally proficient in their duties. The Americans, as a result of combat action had companies commanded by second lieutenants, such as 2LT Timmermann, A/27th Armored Infantry Bn, battalions commanded by majors, like MAJ Deevers, 27th Armored Infantry Bn, and generally lacked platoon leaders. Although all American leaders performed admirably and demonstrated initiative, they nonetheless lacked the experience, expertise and professionalism of their opponents. The major disadvantage of the German command structure was their lack of flexibility. Not only were combat commanders on the west side of the Rhine refused permission to withdraw or prepare positions on the east side,

but the defenders at the bridge had little latitude in taking action. Thus although German leadership had the edge, the circumstances negated any advantage that may have been derived from that edge.

IMMEDIATE MILITARY OBJECTIVES OF EACH ANTAGONIST

In the general sense, both the American Rhineland Campaign and the German defense of the Rhineland were consistent with the broad strategic goals of each nation. The Germans wished to run the entire Western front defense as an economy of force action, while concentrating on the Russians to their east. The Americans, on the other hand, wanted to trap as many Germans as possible west of the Rhine in order to protect General Montgomery's right flank and to eliminate potential resistance east of the Rhine if the Germans were allowed to withdraw.

The German situation, however, became complicated by the fact that the OKW, and in many instances Hitler himself, chose to run the tactical battles from Berlin. In essence, every German commander was under standing orders to defend every bunker to the last man. These orders were punctuated by the OKWE's employment of summary courts-martial where officers found to be derelict in their duties were tried and executed. The result was an inflexible and rigid tactical command system, attempting to operate in an environment where speed and flexibility were essential. 32

The US 12th Army Group, under General Bradley, was ostensibly in support of Montgomery's 21st Army Group attack north of the Ruhr. SHAEF headquarters had agreed to make Montgomery's attack the Western Alliance's main effort. Bradley was to protect Montgomery's right flank in his advance to the Rhine, and then to provide "not less than ten divisions" 33 to Montgomery once he had begun his exploitation east of the Rhine. American Generals from Marshall on down felt slighted by their perceived role in Western Europe. At the time of the Rhineland Campaign, the United States had over three times the number of troops in Europe than did the combined armies of Great Britain and Canada. 34 Furthermore, American financing and industrial power supported the European war on both fronts, and virtually the entire war against Japan. That they were relegated to playing second fiddle to Montgomery did not sit well. The climate was right for the Americans to seize some of the limelight from Britain.

Bradley's advance to the Rhine was conducted on two axes. Hodges's First Army in the north was to secure Montgomery's southern flank by driving east toward Bonn. It was then to turn south along the Rhine to link up with Patton's Third Army thus encircling and trapping German forces in the Rhineland. To this end, Hodges employed his three corps abreast, with Collins' VII Corps in the north, General Milliken's III Corp in the center, and General Huebner's V Corps in the south.

Milliken's III Corps was given the mission of advancing to

the Rhine, linking up with the VII Corps at Bonn, capturing Remagen, and securing crossings over the Ahr River. Milliken employed his 1st Infantry Division to advance to Bonn and link up with VII Corps. The 9th Armored Group was to attack to the river, capture Remagen and secure crossings over the Aar River. These orders were general in nature. The Rhineland Campaign was conducted so rapidly that fragmentary orders which changed unit missions were commonplace, even at division and corps level.

The 9th Armored Division, under Major General Leonard was divided into two Combat Commands. CCB, commanded by Brigadier General Hodges, had the actual mission of attacking to seize the town of Remagen. Orders to CCB did not include the seizure of the Ludendorf Bridge. General Hodges led his attack with elements of the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion supported by tanks from the 14th Tank Battalion. The attack was launched at about 070820 March from a point approximately 10 miles to the northwest of Remagen. It was to proceed at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, and was to bypass or overrun German resistance. The task force, commanded by LTC Engeman, was not under orders to seize the bridge. 35

German orders at the bridge were relatively simple: do not let the advancing Americans capture the bridge intact (under penalty of death), and do not destroy the bridge early (under penalty of death). The German officer in tactical command of the bridge (originally Captain Bratge, then Major Scheller) was required to determine the appropriate time for demolition. The

bridge was essential for the evacuation of the retreating German forces and equipment from the Rhineland, but it was equally essential that the Americans not be handed easy access to the east bank of the Rhine. To accomplish his task the commander of the bridge had about 36 infantrymen reinforced by a handful of engineers, antiaircraft troops and civilians. Efforts to establish a coherent defense proved to be impossible. The OKW's fanatic insistence on defense to the last man in the Rhineland had led to the isolation of large German units, west of the Rhine. At the same time, major boundary changes and changes in command confused communications and reporting procedures. The defense of Remagen was simply overlooked by major German commanders as events in their sectors overtook them, and it fell squarely on the shoulders of the weak garrison commanded by Major Scheller. (See Annex A for individual unit locations and missions) 36

On the morning of 7 March 1945, III Corps was attacking with the 1st Infantry Division in the north, the 9th Infantry and 9th Armored Divisions in the center and the 78 Infantry Division in the south. The 9th Armored Division's main effort was not aimed at the Rhine but rather at crossings of the Ahr River. Combat Command B, 9th Armored Division, was to take the town of Remagen and continue to seize crossing sites over the Ahr. The seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge was never mentioned in the field order. Combat Command B sent one column southeastward toward the Ahr and another column toward Remagen.

When the lead platoon of the Co A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion broke out of the woodline on a hill overlooking Remagen, the Ludendorff Bridge, standing intact, over the Rhine River was truly an unexpected sight. Information and subsequent orders were quickly passed up and down the chain of command and the American force quickly began to take advantage of this windfall.

FEASIBLE COURSES OF ACTION FOR EACH ANTAGONIST

GERMAN ALTERNATIVES

The defense of the Rhine River was the Supreme German Command responsibility. Preparations for such a defense as the last, major, natural barrier leading into the heart of Germany, should have been started at the time of the Allied invasion. The east bank should have been considered the feasible area to consolidate and stop the Allied advance. Improvising for this type of defense was not a well chosen course of action. 37 Later, from the German point of view, they felt that the counterattacks ordered by higher headquarters were an insane course of action which could not possibly stop the Allied Forces' advance. 38

Model had earlier predicted that the Americans would concentrate their forces on the Rhine River near Bonn. This American course of action seemed probable in view of the difficult terrain further up the Rhine. It was the obvious

avenue of approach for the American forces to cross the Rhine, and then later link up with Montgomery's forces that were expected to cross in the north. It was Model's subordinate commander of 15th Army, General von Zangen, who fought reinforcing Bonn's defenses because he was still fighting the 9th US Army, and being penetrated with troops funneling toward the town of Remagen. Zangen, and probably even Model, thought it absurd to hold both banks of the Rhine. Zangen wanted to withdraw and defend against the danger of the Americans seizing his supply and escape route (the railroad bridge) at Remagen. 39 Model refused permission for any troops to be pulled out of the west defensive wall because Hitler had decreed that no pillboxes were to be abandoned without a fight. Furthermore, Model's intelligence staff kept telling him that his forces at Remagen were adequate because the Americans were driving for Bonn anyway. Even the German High Command was more concerned with Patton's Army because his main avenue of approach would strike directly into their First Army Front; this would threaten their weakest connection between the northern and southern Army Groups. Model was so sure that Patton's forces, to the south, constituted the threat that he removed the antiaircraft guns on the cliff that overlooked the Remagen bridge and sent them to Koblenz. 40 Captain Bratge, commanding troops at Remagen, continually warned of hearing American tanks firing and felt an attack was imminent. 41 He was told that it was only a small force protecting the flank of the main drive heading for a crossing point north of the mountains, and the US

forces would follow their usual pattern and mop west of the Rhine before attacking across the river. 42

The Army commanders were still in disagreement with Hitler about holding too broad of a front with depleted strength levels (15 kilometers per division); they feared the whole front would collapse. Hitler, by this time in the war, was not known to follow the advice of his Field Commanders and staff, and he had withdrawn even more authority from them following the attack on his life. So, Hitler's demands over command and staff protest were not uncommon. 43 Additionally, Hitler's level of military involvement and directive of unyielding defense stripped commanders of initiative and authority which made decision making a slow process. What the German commanders needed at Remagen was the flexibility to develop immediate courses of action and the authority to mass forces to counter the American surprise crossing at Remagen.

Completely unaware of their own German troop conditions and to the overwhelming superiority of Allies, the Supreme High Command directed that a large bridgehead from Bonn to Trier be held. As a consequence of Hitler's directives, slow and indecisive action, and incorrect assumptions about US courses of action, seizure of the Remagen Bridge took the Germans by complete surprise. Then, the US forces grew too big to stop or contain before the High Command decided on what course of action to take. 44

ALLIED ALTERNATIVES

At the strategic level, the Allied Forces had laid down the planned course of actions to accomplish crossing the Rhine. The Allied objectives, to capture the political heart of Germany (Berlin) and the Ruhr industrial area, lay just across the Rhine. The main river crossing effort was to be a coordinated operation with the Americans crossing in the south and the British in the north. 45

The US Forces were to mop up remaining pockets of resistance while moving to the west banks of the Rhine River. On 3 March General Bradley, issued orders for Generals Hodges and Patton to prepare their units to move to the Rhine River. Hodges was to close on the river north of Cologne and then to swing southeast for Koblenz and link-up with Patton. This would have forced 12th Army Group to negotiate the rugged mountain terrain along the river, which would not be conducive to a rapid advance. The reasons for their decisions were purely political as it had been decided that the British were to be the first to cross the Rhine River. 46

At the operational level, the bulk of the German forces in the U.S. zone west of the Rhine was rapidly defeated precipitating a race to the Rhine by both British and American forces. 47

At the tactical level, a platoon of the 9th Armored Division's column arrived on a bluff that overlooked the small town of Remagen. The platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Burrows,

saw that the bridge was intact. Once Burrows fully realized the importance of his find, he wanted to direct his mortars onto the mass of enemy troops crossing the bridge. 48 His commander, First Lieutenant Timmerman, decided that they should employ artillery and tank guns with mortars. This request was sent to the battalion where the battalion directed instead that only direct fire weapons, tanks in particular, would be used to prevent destruction of the bridge. Without reference to orders, including General Hodges', the division commander ordered the division into the town as fast as possible to capture the bridge for a crossing site. 49

IV. THE FIGHT

Certainly, if the Remagen bridgehead operation had been conceived in the minds of the Allied staff, it would be historically footnoted as one of the most successful deception operations in military annals. To state that it was a phased operation connates some form of planning, but as has been previously noted, it was not the intention of the Allied armies to attempt a crossing of a bridge at Remagen; therefore, no formal plans existed for such an operation. The Germans too were greatly surprised by the establishment of a bridgehead at Remagen, having previously prepared for defense of more likely crossings north and south of that city. All German intelligence indicated that Remagen was an unlikely spot and the terrain and avenues of approach from Remagen to the industrial Ruhr were among the least favorable for attacking forces. So the sudden

thrust of the First Army across the Rhein at Remagen caught the Germans unprepared. Hardly more prepared were the US forces that conducted the river crossing. In fact, the Remagen operation in its initial stages resembled a hasty river crossing which is characterized by lack of detailed planning, crossing from the march, and continuation of the attack. Only after the 9th Armored Division met stiff enemy resistance in the high ground east of the Rhine did the operation come more to resemble a deliberate rather than a hasty river crossing. Still, in retrospect, the Remagen bridgehead operation had three definite phases: an assault phase; expansion of the bridgehead; and finally breakout from the bridgehead area.

THE ASSAULT PHASE

With trepidation Lieutenant Timmerman, Commander of Company A, 27th Mechanized Infantry Company, raised his arm to motion for members of his unit to cross the Remagen Bridge. In the few short moments prior to that act, he and his men had witnessed an explosion caused by German demolition munitions which had created a thirty foot crater immediately in front of the west entrance to the bridge, and from which he now motioned in "Follow Me" tradition of the infantry. The crater meant that his infantrymen would have to cross without the tank support from the platoon of Fershing tanks that had been attached to his company for the assault. If the first explosion had not been disconcerting enough, it was quickly followed by a second, on the bridge itself, that raised the huge structure and left a blanket of smoke and debris that masked, for a few brief

moments, the fact that the bridge remained intact. Moreover, as Timmerman exited the crater, he was immediately taken under small arms fire from German soldiers located in the bridge towers, and his command came under 20mm antiaircraft fires from German units located on the east bank. Under the protective fires of the tank platoon, which immediately fired upon enemy located in a tunnel on the east bank of the Rhine, Lieutenant Timmerman led his reluctant soldiers across Remagen Bridge. This was a suicide mission, and was undertaken as such. Even the Combat Command B Commander, General Hodge, had written off as much as a battalion as the cost of seizing the bridge. 50 Timmerman's men were not only concerned with the enemy fires, for they had no way of knowing whether other demolitions would be set off, tumbling the bridge and them into the icy waters of the Rhine. About halfway across the bridge, the lead platoon came under heavy fire from the bridge towers again, and also from the tunnel constructed on the east side of the bridge. Supporting and reinforcing fires from friendly forces on the east bank suppressed and neutralized the bulk of the enemy fires, but the assault force came under heavy sniper attack all the way across the bridge. Tanks fired at a submerged barge which had taken Timmerman's company under fire, causing the occupants to surrender. Eventually, a sergeant named Delisio cleared the towers of enemy, and an assistant squad leader in the first platoon, a Sergeant Drabik, ran to the end of the bridge, becoming the first Allied soldier to cross the Rhine. The remainder of his platoon followed him to the end of the

bridge and wheeled north where they set up defensive positions in bomb craters and awaited the arrival of reinforcements.

Meanwhile, engineers, who had accompanied Timmerman and his first platoon across the bridge, cutting and shooting demolition cables as they went, located the last of the preset demolitions and disabled them. Soon the remaining platoons of Company A had crossed. Second platoon was ordered to scale the Erpeler Ley, the 650 foot cliff that overlooked the bridge from the north. Several members of the platoon were successful in reaching the top; however, the casualties were high and those that did succeed in reaching the summit were too few to attack the Germans defending the hill. The remainder of Company A, about 120 strong, was spread thinly throughout the bridgehead area, defending against counterattack, guarding the entrance to the tunnel, and combatting snipers that continued harassing fires throughout the afternoon.

On the east bank of the river, engineers worked feverishly to fill the crater so that tanks could begin to cross the bridge. Companies B and C, 27th Infantry Battalion, were in the process of crossing the bridge. In order for vehicles to cross, planking had to be laid across the bridge. Most of the bridge had this planking intact because Germans had been fleeing the west bank of the river to escape attacking American forces prior to the assault. However, the explosion had destroyed a portion of the planking, and made the bridge impassable by vehicles until it could be repaired. Engineers estimated this could only

be accomplished after nightfall on 7 March because of heavy German artillery fires on the structure. 51

The night of 7 March, nine tanks crossed the Remagen Bridge. They were followed by tank destroyers. Unfortunately, the lead destroyer slipped off the planking in the darkness and became lodged in a hole in the bridge. It prevented passage of more vehicles, and was not dislodged until 0530 the next day. During that night, forces on the east bank were in a precarious position. Not only were the infantry widely dispersed, but the nine tanks were spread so thinly that they could not be supported by infantry in their night positions. This made the tanks extremely vulnerable to dismounted assault by the Germans, but miraculously, they and the other forces in the bridgehead held on until reinforcements could cross the next morning. Within 24 hours of initial assault, American forces were strong enough to hold the bridgehead, and the bridge stood intact. Over 8,000 American soldiers occupied the east bank of the Rhine. These were members of two armored infantry battalions, one tank battalion, two infantry regiments, three other infantry battalions, and tank destroyer, reconnaissance, engineer and antiaircraft company sized units. 52

In early March, the German forces defending the Remagen Bridge were commanded by Captain Bratge, an experienced combat veteran who was appalled at the conditions under which he had to operate. In the Remagen area in early March were fewer than

1,000 German military. Among them were Bratge's 36 infantrymen, convalescing from wounds received in other areas and about 120 engineers, whose job it was to keep the bridge operational for use by German forces retreating across the Rhine, and to prepare and execute demolitions if the Americans threatened to capture the bridge. Also in the area were other units: 180 of Hitler's Jugend not under Bratge's control; 120 Eastern Volunteers, made up of Polish and Russian combatants whose reliability was not only questionable, but nonexistent; antiaircraft units with a strength of 200, most of which were moved south to support the defense against Patton's Third Army before the seizure of Remagen; and Volksturm, numbering 500, whose commander assured Bratge that only 10 percent would show up for a battle and most of those would not fight.⁵³ There were other units in the area that could reinforce in time, if their respective commanders would allow them to be released for that mission. Everyone from Bratge to the German High Command knew that the success of operations at Remagen depended on successfully destroying the bridge if it became necessary to do so.

As Lieutenant Timmerman led his assault force across the Remagen Bridge, the German resistance effort on the east bank began to dissolve. Morale of the German soldiers, lowered due to the protracted war, further deteriorated as a steady stream of German Army units fled eastward across the Rhine. The attitude of German citizens in surrounding villages, who advocated capitulation to American forces as a means to end the incessant Allied bombings, and the utter hopelessness of

defending west of the river with a handful of infantry and engineer soldiers also took a toll on German morale. The last hope of the German forces was destruction of the bridge. And for this they were well prepared.

Unlike the American Army, that had good fortune and little in the way of preparation for crossing the Rhine at Remagen, the Germans had long planned for demolition of bridges spanning their traditional defensive barrier. Even during construction of the bridge, during World War I, demolition compartments, later filled with concrete by occupying French forces, were prepared to prevent use of the bridge by an attacking enemy.⁵⁴ For months, German engineers had busily emplaced explosives, laid demolition wire in protective metal tubing and tested all circuits on a periodic basis. The demolition system, as planned, was adequate, redundant, and robust; however, a series of unforeseen events ruined the German plan to destroy the bridge.

Weeks earlier, another bridge in German hands had been inadvertently destroyed when an Allied bomb set off prepositioned demolition materials. In the waning days of the Rheinland campaign, the order went out that all demolition material was to be removed, and reemplaced on existing bridges, only when Allied Army attack was imminent. Furthermore, those responsible for loss of a bridge to the enemy, or for blowing up a bridge too soon, faced a possible death penalty. Unfortunately, also, was that Captain Friesenhan, the German engineer commander at

Remagen, had ordered 600 kilograms of explosives, an amount he determined necessary to destroy the bridge. But the requisition was only half filled and that with less powerful industrial munitions. A final problem was that the command channels for defense of the bridge changed so frequently, as the frenzied German Staff attempted to shore up hole after hole in its deteriorating defense of the homeland, that Captain Bratge did not know who to report to in case of emergency. Contributing to this deficiency was the complete inadequacy of wire and courier communications from Remagen to higher headquarters. The result was that on the day of execution the bridge failed to fall into the Rhine, German defense forces defending the bridge gave only token resistance to the American assault, and Bratge's higher headquarter, 5th Army Group, failed to learn of the loss of the bridge in time to take effective action.

On the day before the Allied attack, responsibility for Remagen was given to LXVII German Corps, the commander of which sent a Major Scheller to the bridge to assume command of the defense forces there. Scheller arrived at Remagen late on the morning of 7 March, and seeing that Allied attack was imminent, he attempted to organize a defense with German forces fleeing across the Rhine to the west bank. When this proved futile, Scheller then held up demolition of the bridge when asked to do so by a member of an artillery unit that wanted his unit to pass to the east bank before the bridge was blown. When the artillery unit failed to arrive, Scheller, upon the advice of

Cpt. Friesenhahn, ordered the bridge blown. The delay in blowing the bridge allowed Allied forces the opportunity for the crossing when the demolition failed. Major Schelling attempted to report the loss of the bridge to his higher headquarters, but when all other attempts failed, he took a bicycle and peddled off to report the incident personally, leaving Cpt. Bratge once again in charge of defense of the Ludendorf Bridge.

Bratge himself was unable to organize resistance to the platoon of American infantry that seized the bridge. He found himself among remnants of his forces, panic stricken civilians and Volkssturm soldiers changing into civilian clothes, in the cave adjacent to the bridge. Seeing that further resistance could only result in the loss of life with no hope of success, Bratge at first attempted to relinquish his command to another German officer. ⁵⁵ When no one was willing to assume command and counterattack the American forces, Bratge surrendered. Later, as a prisoner of war, he would be tried by a Hitler appointed tribunal and sentenced, in absentia, to death.

EXPANSION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD

With the assault phase successfully over and a foothold gained on the east bank of the Rhine, the III US Corps began to expand the bridgehead. The first problem that faced the corps was to gain approval to exploit the seizure of the bridge from the 12th Army Group Commander, General Bradley, and ultimately, the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower. To these generals' credit, both gave immediate approval for expansion of

the bridgehead, and dedicated five divisions to do so. However, the overall plan for the Rhine crossing was not abandoned. Forces at Remagen were restricted in size and mission to allow Field Marshall Montgomery's 21st Army Group to make the main effort in the north to seize the industrial Ruhr area.

The next problem the Americans had to overcome was the disengagement of III Corps forces already in contact with enemy forces in zone so that they could proceed to the bridgehead to reinforce the assaulting 9th Armored Division's units. This was easier than expected because German resistance west of the Rhine had almost completely broken down, thus, US units not otherwise needed in a mop-up operation were free to move to Remagen (which relieved 9th Infantry Division of its corps support mission). Almost immediately upon assault of the bridge, a 4.5" gun battalion, a 155mm gun battalion, and 8" howitzer battalion moved into the area west of the Ludendorff Bridge and supported the assault with indirect fires. Additionally, all available air defense units were sent to the bridge and when weather permitted, air cover was flown by US Army Air Corps fighters. Engineer units were sent to repair the bridge and within 24 hours had begun operations to supplement the railroad bridge with tactical ones to assist in passing forces over the Rhine. Later the 7th Armored Division was attached to III Corps. Then the 78th Division was relieved by the 2d Infantry Division of its mission with V Corps and ordered to the bridge, with the 47th Infantry Regiment crossing the bridge the morning of 8 March and taking up defensive positions in the center of the

bridgehead. Soon the 47th Regiment was followed by the 511 Infantry , 78th Division.

Other units were lined up on the west border waiting to cross. So severe were traffic congestion problems that only one battalion of the 60th Infantry Regiment was able to cross the bridge during the night of 8-9 March. These traffic control problems were exacerbated by German artillery fire which rained almost continuously on the bridge. The Germans had succeeded in getting much of the artillery from the west border of the Rhine to the east before the Ludendorf Bridge was captured. Over 110 artillery tubes were available for German use at one point. Indeed, the lack of ammunition was more a constraint on their artillery fires than was the lack of artillery pieces. Additionally, weather permitted German air strikes in the area to add to the artillery harassment. 56

As III US Corps was reinforcing troops east of the Rhine and protecting the bridge, they began to expand the bridgehead area. Three bridgehead lines were established: Line Red, Line White, and Line Blue. Line Red, about 2.5 miles deep, was at a distance where small arms fire could not affect forces crossing the bridge. Line White was beyond observed artillery range; and Line Blue (to Bonn and the Autobahn) was far enough out that no tube artillery could reach the bridge. The 9th Infantry Division was placed in command of forces on the east bank on 9 March, and directed operations, with guidance from Corps, until the breakout.

On 8 March, US forces met little resistance and advanced toward Line White. By the end of 9 March, the 311th Infantry occupied the north portion of the bridgehead and the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion was in the south.

On 9 March, all organized German resistance west of the Rhine had ended, but the defenders on the east bank stiffened as elements of the 11th Panzer Division entered the battle. Nearly all remaining elements of the 75th Infantry Division crossed the Rhine and took up positions in the north portion of the bridgehead. Additionally, the 99th Infantry Division was attached to III Corps and began to move into a position for crossing the river on 10 March, eventually assuming responsibility for the northern sector of the bridgehead. The III Corps engineer took control of all engineer operations at Remagen and began construction of a contact boom, a log boom, and net boom upriver from the Ludendorff Bridge, and planned a heavy pontoon bridge. Antiaircraft defenses were bolstered by the arrival of the 16th AA Artillery Group, and artillery with corps and the divisions continued their support, primarily from positions on the west bank.

Starting on 10 March, expansion of the bridgehead became more difficult as enemy resistance stiffened. The 78th Divisions' 311th and 309th Infantry Regiments did advance beyond Line White and the 311th captured the city of Honef. In the south, the 9th Armored Division's Combat Command B also attacked

to Line White. In the center, however, the 47th Infantry Regiment met heavy resistance from the 11th Panzer Division counterattacks, and required assistance to gain about 1000 yards.

It must be noted that while progress was slow, it was not entirely due to enemy action, although by 10 and 11 March the Germans had finally gotten organized enough to send considerable forces toward Remagen. The terrain, as has been previously noted, was steep and compartmented, particularly east of Remagen and favored the defender. Of particular importance is that the Allied Force still had to support the 26th Army Group's main effort in the north. Therefore, Eisenhower ordered that the bridgehead be expanded to a size no larger than could be defended by five divisions.⁵⁷ The III Corps was therefore restricted to advances of 1000 yards per day, in some cases, to insure that forces were not committed beyond those available for the operation. Then too, there was some misunderstanding between the Corps commander, General Milliken and the Army Commander, General Hodges, as to where the main effort should be placed. General Milliken initially planned a gradual expansion of the entire bridgehead area to over the problem of control of forces that was caused by piecemeal commitment of battalions and regiments as they slowly made their way across the bridge. It was his contention that a large concentration of attack forces was not possible under those conditions. General Hodges, however, wanted to make a main effort in the north to relieve

pressure on river crossing sites for the US VII Corps. When General Milliken finally understood General Hodges' intentions, he immediately took steps to place his major emphasis on the northern portion of the bridgehead.

German resistance was also a factor in the slow advance of US forces in the bridgehead area on 11 March. Not only did elements of the 11th Panzer Division counterattack at Honef (northern portion of bridgehead area) temporarily recapturing the town, but other German units were soon to join the battle. On 13 March, units of the 13 Volksgrenadier Division arrived and were placed by General Bayerlein into the area east of Honef to help stem the American advance northward. Later that same day the 130th Infantry Regiment arrived. General Bayerlein wanted to counterattack using this comparatively fresh force of 2000 soldiers; however, Field Marshal Model overruled and the 130th Infantry Regiment went into the defensive line to reinforce the 340th Volksgrenadier Division. Model's thinking was typical of the German general staff which saw tanks as a counterattack force. Model saw no opportunity for counterattack at Remagen until enough German infantry arrived to free committed tank units for counterattack. As a result, the 130th Infantry Regiment was committed piecemeal and the Germans lost another, and probably the last, opportunity for an effective counterattack, as by 14 March, American forces in the Remagen area were too strong and German forces spread too thinly for effective offensive action. It must be noted that failure of the German command to marshall enough force against the American

Remagen operation was extremely difficult. Not only had numerous units been lost in fighting west of the Rhine in the fruitless defense of the Siegfried Line, but field commanders were having a difficult time reequipping and reorganizing units for the defense of the homeland east of the Rhine. Field Marshal Kesselring was hard pressed to defend along the entire Rhine against river crossings he knew to be planned by the 21st Army Group near Bonn and the southern crossing site of 12th Army Group. Furthermore, he and other field commanders were hampered by orders from Hitler and the high command that removed the flexibility and initiative of the field commanders. Finally, allied air superiority, against which the German forces were practically defenseless at this point in the war, took a tremendous toll on German forces, the mobility of German units, and on the morale of the soldiers.

From 13-17 March, the Germans continued to commit forces to Remagen area. On 13 March, the 272d Volks Grenadier Division, badly attrited from fighting west of the Rhine, arrived, followed by an equally weak 227th Volks Grenadier Division. On 14 March, the 3rd Parachute Division arrived and on 17 March the 20th Volks Grenadier Division assumed positions. While this brought an impressive array of German divisions to the Remagen area, in reality, most were not much larger than battle group size. Continuing casualties and defections reduced these units to a shadow of their former fighting capability. 58

On 15 March, the 1st Division of the US VII Corps crossed

the Rhine over III Corps bridges and the next day assumed responsibility for the northern portion of the bridgehead. The 78th Division was absorbed by VII Corps and on 16 March the Division cut the Ruhr-Frankfurt autobahn northeast of Honef. As they were now beyond the range of artillery firing from the west bank, Allied artillery units began moving across the Rhine. Three new bridges were under construction to support this movement.

On 17 March, the Ludendorff Bridge, weakened by demolition charges, pounded by artillery fire, and shaken by the firing of American antiaircraft and artillery weapons surrounding it, fell into the river. By this time, it had little tactical significance because American engineers had constructed numerous tactical bridges across the river and were in the process of completing more. The bridge had withstood the heavy traffic of American vehicles, the air strikes of German aircraft, V-2 rocket firings, and the attack by enemy frogmen. For all practical purposes, the 17th of March also ended the bridgehead operation, as American forces were firmly in control and German forces too weak to affect a major action against the crossing. Allied forces were now poised for a breakout from the bridgehead.

THE KEY EVENTS

The events leading up to and the battle for the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge and expansion of the bridgehead were full

of critical events. None of these events were anticipated by commanders on either side; however, all of them were instrumental in insuring the success of the US III Corps in the capture of the bridge.

The first significant event was Field Marshal Model's failure to properly allocate forces to the defense of the Remagen area. General von Zangen recognized this shortfall and requested additional support, but fortunately for the 9th Armored Division, he was denied. This failure to reinforce the Remagen sector early in March 1945 was later to haunt the German high command.

The second key element was the switching of commanders of the 5th and 15th Armies by Field Marshal Model. The resulting "paper change" of names only confused most subordinates. Captain Bratge, the initial commander of the Ludendorff Bridge security forces, was completely confused by the change, and was not sure who his immediate commander was after the change. On the morning of 7 March, when Major Scheller arrived to take command, Captain Bratge was not sure what to do. He eventually relinquished command; however, this strange command relationship precluded rapid decision making when the time arrived to blow the bridge. 59

The third key event occurred when the bridge did not collapse when the decision to destroy it was finally made. There is much speculation as to why only some of the demolition charges detonated. Because the Americans did not immediately

investigate the situation and because the bridge eventually collapsed taking all evidence with it, the truth will never be known. The fact that it did not fall, however, was extremely significant and key. 60

The fourth key event was the German inability to effectively counterattack in force in a timely manner. The 11th Panzer Division was assembled near Duesseldorf and could have struck a telling blow soon after the crossing if they had had gasoline for their vehicles. Their eventual arrival in the bridgehead area two days later was a little late.

Because of the fluid tactical situation, many higher German commanders were not informed about the loss of the bridge for many hours after the fact. Field Marshal Model did not find out until the morning of 8 March 1945, some 16 to 18 hours after the bridge fell into American hands.

The key events surrounding the entire Remagen operation all favored the Americans. The American leadership also acted swiftly in exploiting an unexpected fortune of war. All commanders did something positive at once. Decisions were made in a timely manner, and orders were executed properly and rapidly. It also appears the "Lady Luck" was on their side.

THE OUTCOME

The capture of the Ludendorff Bridge by elements of the 9th

Armored Division was a clear cut victory for the allies. It was the result of fate or luck rather than mastermind planning or great tactical leadership. In addition to luck, the Americans had the superior force in personnel, organization and equipment. The American commanders made decisions very rapidly without waiting for approval from the next higher commander. This enabled the combat forces to move rapidly and secure a foothold around the bridge before the Germans could destroy it. The German effort was weakened by the lack of good wise leadership and all actions/reactions were delayed due to indecision at all levels of command.

At this stage of the war, the German Army had experienced defeat after defeat and was only a shell of the formidable force it had once been. Most units were operating at a greatly reduced strength in both personnel and equipment. Most of their replacements were old men or very young men and were poorly trained. Conversely, the American forces were used to victory and could feel the end of the war close at hand. Their morale was sky high.

As far as the execution of plans and orders is concerned, neither side was very successful. The German plan completely fell apart and the American forces never had a plan to capture this bridge. They saw it as an unexpected target of opportunity and rapidly altered all existing plans and orders to conform to the new crossing site.

The American III Corps sustained approximately 5500

casualties during the period of 7 through 24 March. Of this number, almost 700 were killed and 600 were listed as missing. An accurate account of German KIA, WIA, and MIA, is still not available for the battle around the Ludendorff Bridge but American units took more than 11,700 prisoners alone. It is evident that German casualties greatly outnumbered those of the Americans.⁶¹

The question as to whether the capture of the bridge shortened the war is moot. The German forces were doomed to defeat and would have been beaten anyway, probably just as quickly. The capture of the bridge however, was very significant in that it was a serious blow to German morale and that may well have been partly responsible for the poor German performance at other crossing points over the Rhine.

The loss of the bridge did require a complete alteration to German plans for the defense of the Rhine. The crossing at Remagen caused a shift in tactical units on the front lines and in the overall focus of the tactical reserve units. To the Americans, the bridgehead had become a powerhouse and the payoff was the breakout from the bridgehead and the subsequent dash to the east and north which sealed off the Ruhr and trapped approximately 300,000 German troops.

The capture of the Ludendorff Bridge is outstanding proof that the American principles of warfare, with emphasis on initiative, resourcefulness, aggressiveness, and willingness to

assume risks for great results are sound. Lastly, there is no substitute for good sound leadership characterized by rapid decision making. At Remagen, this trait was shown by leaders from squad level all the way up to Army level. At all levels, leaders unhesitatingly seized upon the opportunity presented and rode it to a successful execution and ultimate victory.

V. ASSESS SIGNIFICANCE

A great deal of controversy exists among military historians analyzing the battle of Remagen. Some believe that this battle served only to sensationalize American exploits in the news media for the folks back home. Certainly it did do that. They would further argue that its significance, both immediate and long-term, was minor if not irrelevant. Genmaj Wagener, Chief of Staff, Army Group B, agreed with this assessment of the battle during his interrogation by the U.S. Army on 4 Feb 46. Wagener stated, "Actually, however, the bridgehead had a decisive effect neither on the attack across the Rhine nor the ultimate outcome of the war. It did not, apparently, greatly affect the plans and intentions of the Americans. Enemy forces were later able to cross the Rhein at will; examples are the crossings at Wesel and Oppenheim." 63 Although Hodges First Army pushed, with Eisenhower's approval, more than four divisions into the bridgehead area, it was a limited objective offensive. At most the "exploitation" had as its primary goal a link-up with Patton's Third Army drive

through Frankfurt and to Kassel.

Analysts insist that while offering the opportunity of a standing bridge across the last natural barrier to Germany's heartland, the mountainous and canalized terrain east of the bridge favored the German defense. This was a view also shared by SHAEF's G3, General Bull, who argued unsuccessfully that forces sent across at Remagen would have nowhere to go. Additionally, critics pointed out that its location rendered it insignificant because it influenced neither Montgomery's major northern push nor the supporting American attack in the south. After all, Eisenhower's strategy in March was to get all Allied Forces aligned at the Rhine and then use Montgomery's 21st Army Group as the main attack. Therefore, the bridgehead at Remagen offered no tactical advantage and did not support the strategic plan.

Strategically, it was a dead end and for both sides its danger was to the forces which it consumed as the battle waged. Montgomery was extremely worried about the cost of maintaining and exploiting the bridgehead at his 21st Army Group's expense. He viewed it as another example of American stupidity in dispersing forces rather than adhering to the principle of concentration.⁶⁴ On the national level, Churchill was also concerned that the Supreme Commander would be distracted from supporting Montgomery who was positioned along the shortest route to, in his view, what should be the Allied prize objective-Berlin. The Remagen bridgehead became an excuse for

Eisenhower to support a broad front attack with Bradley's 12th Army Group in the south and Montgomery's thrust across the Rhine in the north. ⁶⁵ From the German perspective, Hitler had decreed that no pillbox would be abandoned without a fight. This prevented General von Zangen, Commander, 15th Army, from getting the Corps he had ;requested from Field Marshal von Rundstedt for the defense of the Remagen bridgehead. ⁶⁶ Field commanders were only too aware that the existence of a 60 mile gap, which included Remagen, could have disastrous effect on the general plan for defense. Yet, Gen. Model was convinced that the mountainous terrain beyond Remagen would dissuade the Americans from crossing there. This conclusion was similar to the view held by Field Marshal Montgomery and the SHAEF staff. Model's intelligence staff believed that the German forces at Remagen were adequate because the Americans were definitely driving for Bonn. Even Gen. Keitel, Chief of High Command of the Armed Forces, had made it clear to Gen. von Rundstedt, Commander in the West, that he would have to answer to Hitler personally for the continuing reverses on the Western Front. ⁶⁷ Therefore, it was not surprising that General von Rundstedt was replaced with Field Marshall Kesselring by Hitler after the Ludendorff bridge was lost. Hitler told Kesselring that Germany had to hold on in the west until the Eastern Front had stabilized, then reinforcements could be moved from the east to the west. Hitler saw Remagen as the weak link in the German defense and therefore insisted that the Americans be driven back across the Rhine. ⁶⁸

With this orientation, Kesselring used critical German assets to neutralize the Remagen Bridge sites. In addition to ground forces, critical Luftwaffe assets (planes, ordinance and pilots) were drawn from other points in the western front. The Germans used the V2 rockets (the only tactical application during the war) and the giant railway mounted Morser Karl gun. Thus, the sure benefit of the Remagen Bridge battle was that it caused the Germans to react thereby dissipating their forces in piecemeal efforts to repulse the Allied thrust. 69

Additionally, the loss of the bridge instilled fear into the German officer corps because of Hitler's irrational reaction. Hitler set up a "Flying Special Tribunal West" headed by LTG Hubner, a fanatical Nazi. Several officers, including Major Scheller, were tried for cowardice and shot. Albert Speer called it the "Shock of Remagen" which put commanders in a state of terror until the war ended. What effect did the loss of this bridge have on the German officer corps? It is believed likely that Model, remembering Hitler's reaction to the loss of the bridge, committed suicide after he lost the Ruhr. 70

It is likely that the importance of Remagen should be properly assessed as between the extremes of strategic significance and tactical irrelevance. Certainly, from the American perspective, basic Allied strategy changed after seizing the bridge. Up to this point, Montgomery's northern attack toward Berlin was to be the main attack. However, with

the success at Remagen, the center attack became the main effort with an avenue through Frankfurt to Kassel and then due east toward the Leipzig-Dresden area. 71

For the military practitioner, perhaps Remagen's greatest significance is its potential instructional value. The first lesson was that quick exploitation of the bridgehead is imperative for success. The Americans got their armor forces across as soon as possible in order to capitalize on the potential of the combined arms team. Engineer, anti-aircraft artillery and tactical air support were integrated into the operation. 72

Secondly, the Allies used smoke obscuration with anti-aircraft weapons to keep the Luftwaffe from hitting the bridge. In spite of intense German artillery (including V2 rockets) and these air attacks, the Allies' efforts kept the bridge sites operational. 73

Thirdly, the Germans failed to counterattack in force until March 25 while the American Armor was still stuck in the bridgehead. On that day the armor began to push rapidly ahead towards the autobahn to link up with Patton's forces. In the defense, timing is everything for a successful counterattack of an enemy bridgehead. 74

Fourthly, initiative by field commanders is the key to success. Gen. Hodges walked the fine line between disobeying orders and using his own initiative to exploit all options of

the battle. While he may have been motivated for self gain and recognition, he still demonstrated initiative and daring, as did his subordinate commanders. Future wars will be won by field commanders with imagination and initiative. 75

Finally, the command and control of a defensive operation, with respect to bridges, must be vested in one person. That person must be present, observing the situation first hand in order to make the split second decision to blow the bridges. This was not the case. Major Friesenhahn, the German engineer, had to find Major Scheller, who possessed the sole authority to permit destruction of the bridge. By the time Friesenhahn got permission from Scheller to blow it, it was essentially too late. They had allowed the Americans to get two tanks to the middle of the bridge and were receiving effective fires from the American side. The demolitions did not work and the Americans prevented the Germans from correcting the problem. 76

Seizure of the Ludendorff bridge was a splendid tactical success in the best tradition of American initiative. In practical terms, after three weeks, the bridgehead had been expanded to only an eight mile depth and 20 mile frontage do to restrictions imposed by SHAEF. To place the capture of the intact bridge in perspective it must be recognized that Eisenhower stated in his war biography, "After the fifth day, by which time out Treadways (floating tactical bridges) were fully capable of sustaining the troops on the far side, we ceased using the Ludendorff structure." 77 On March 17, 1945, ten days

after its capture, the bridge fell due to three causes: the structural weakening from the incomplete German demolition attempt, the subsequent damage from enemy artillery and the over use by American units anxious to push as much across the structure as soon as possible.

Two weeks after capturing the bridge at Remagen, Patton's Third Army crossed the Rhine. The next day Montgomery crossed the Rhine north of the Ruhr to start his "race" to the Elbe. Major combat elements of these forces crossed the Rhine with relative ease and marked the beginning of the final phase of the war in Europe.

Perhaps Remagen's greatest value was in its catalytic affect upon Eisenhower's decision to support Bradley's 12th Army Group offensive at a time when he had planned to support Montgomery's 21st Army Group as the main effort. After Remagen Eisenhower had an excuse or instrument to justify a shift from the single thrust to the broad front strategy allowing him to reinforce success. By this time it had become reasonable for him to expect that Patton would move faster than the British which would satisfy Marshall's desire to increase press coverage of the American Army's accomplishments. Marshall was anticipating lean years in the Army's post-war budget if the Marine and the British efforts continued to dominate the news in the closing months of the war. Eisenhower was also under pressure from his subordinate American generals to give them more of the action and more resources. On the day that Bradley

reported the capture of the bridge at Remagen General Bull told Bradley, "Ike's heart is in your sector, but right now his mind is up north." 78

On March 19, 1945 Bradley and Eisenhower took a five day "vacation" at Cannes. They had lengthy discussions about the final objectives in SHAEF's strategy for the defeat of Germany. Specifically, should Eisenhower support Churchill's and his British dominated staff's desire to race the Russians for Berlin? Or, should he advance with his main effort into Germany's center to cut the enemy forces in half, meet the Russians at Dresden, and prevent the Germans from retreating into the Alps (one of Ike's greatest fears) to conduct a protracted guerilla campaign? Stephen Ambrose, who has studied these Eisenhower years extensively, suggested that, "Had Bradley been on the northern flank, Eisenhower might well have sent him to Berlin." 79 But 12th Army Group was in the center and ultimately Eisenhower decided to make his main thrust there, with Dresden as the link-up point between the American and Russian armies. Ambrose also pointed out that at this stage of the war Eisenhower was so fed up with Montgomery's criticism of American military operations that he had finally stopped talking to Monty.

Remagen was a tactical victory for the American Army that provided a psychological advantage to the soldiers involved and to their generals who were competing with the British for Eisenhower's resources. Allowing the Allies to cross into the

Fatherland as a result of German mistakes was a tremendous psychological blow to the Germans. To the historian the Remagen bridgehead offers a vehicle to assess the impact of political and national strategy prejudices made apparent by an event, but inherent in coalition warfare.

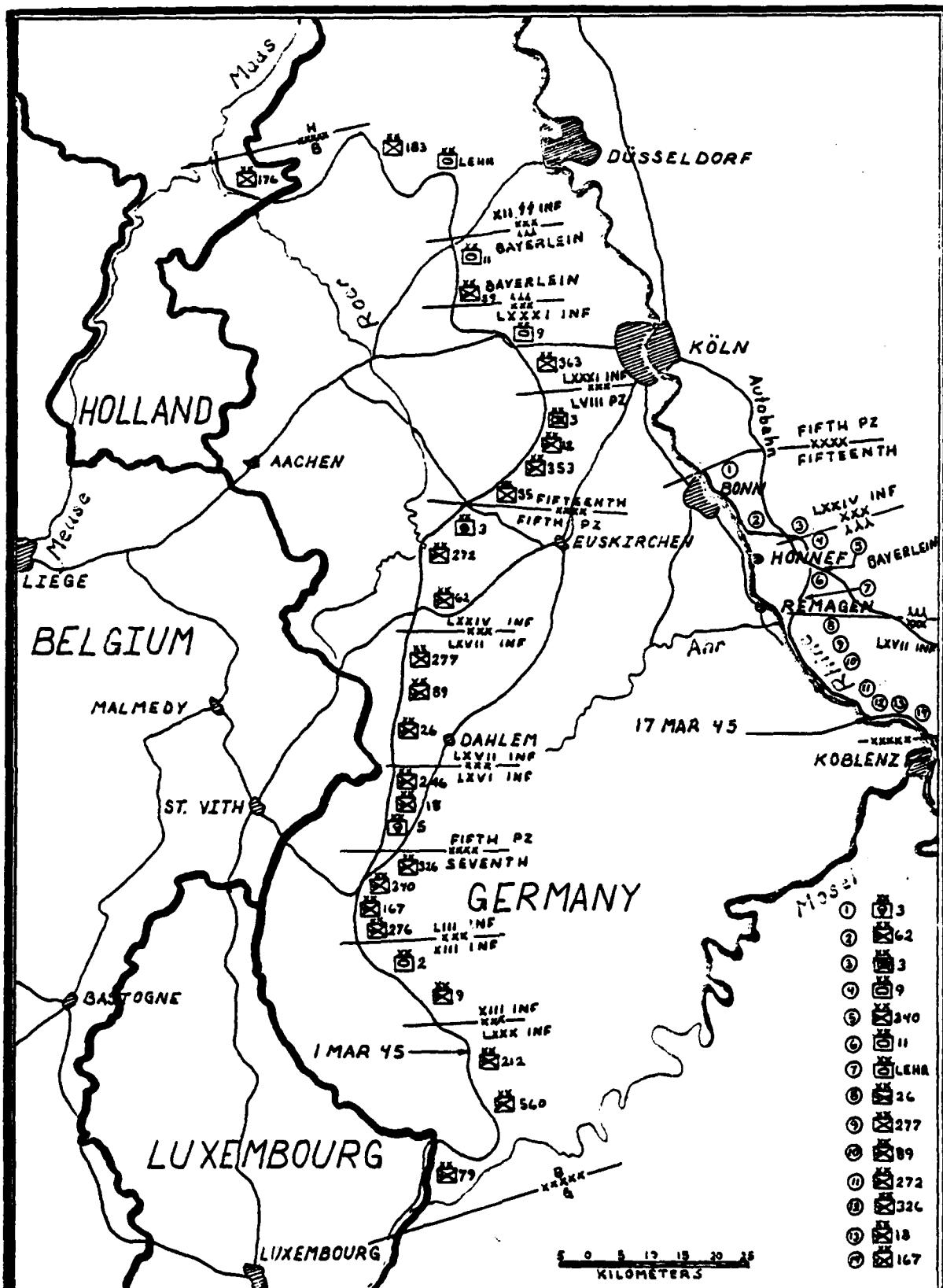
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68. ibid., p. 202.

69. ibid., p. 205.
70. Bradley, A General's Life, p. 406.
71. ibid., p. 430.
72. ibid., p. 407.
73. Allen, One More River, pp. 177 and 194.
74. ibid., p. 190.
75. ibid., p. 204.
76. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 381.
77. Ambrose, The Supreme Commander, p. 618.
78. Eisenhower, Volume One, Soldier, General of the Army, President-elect, 1890-1952, pp 392-393.
79. Ambrose, The Supreme Commander, p. 617.



REMAGEN BRIDGE: German Situation on 1 MARCH 1945 & 17 MARCH 1945

Note major boundary and organizational changes

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3 - 86

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